North State Refrain

Thomas H. Spence

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By

Thomas H. Spence

Author of

Westward Across Nebraska

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To E. H. S.

'Mid mountains high I found you,
And e'er shall love them well;
For, with the dark hills round you,
Beneath your charm I fell;
And in those hills I won you
When springtide shone benign;
Their spell was cast upon you
Till you were wholly mine.

So with the night winds resting
Where summits starward soar,
Awearied from their questing,
I'll bless those peaks once more,
Since they, in April, led you
To love me in that spring,
And promise I might wed you
Some summer evening.

The author desires to give this expression of his gratitude to Mrs. Lloyd Wright, of Beatrice, Nebraska, for her helpful suggestions concerning the verses set down on these pages.

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Farewell to the Shore

No more by the sands of the ocean we'll slumber,
For now to the hills it is up and away,
Nor tell of the stars in the east-sky their number,
Nor strain for such tidings as sea-winds convey;

No longer we'll list in the pale of the star-light
For cry of some night bird from over still dune;
Nor gaze on the deep toward the flare of a far-light,
Afade in the dull of the dim of the moon.

Blowing Rock

What lovelier sight hath earth to offer man
In comely vale or mountain's climbing peak
Than that which from thine ancient bartizan
Looms south and westward, whence the winds oblique
Stream in across thy ledge in constant flow?
The valley's sweep, well-favored, lies below
Full half a mile, and further is removed
From tumult of an ever-anxious world.
While in the lower distance curled,
E'er twilight's final charm be proved,
The smoke from Globe with reticence ascends.

That olden mountain on the sunset sky
In far enchantment rises, clear from haze,
As Dark across the hills comes passing by;
And light on Brown's long summit weirdly plays.

The Gridiron and the Greeks

O, a college is a citadel of learning! Is it not?
With a faculty discoursing in a manner polyglot,
As they feast on abstract knowledge and exult in ancient lore,
Though there may be stupid students who would value half-backs more!

But I'd rather make a touchdown than to conjugate a verb,
For inflection may be charming but to score is nigh superb,
All despite an intuition, rooted deeply in my soul,
That the classics will be current when they kick the final goal.

Mount Mitchell

The axe hath hewn away thy dress,
Deprived thee of thy loveliness;
For beauty must be sacrificed
When timber is so highly prized.

Cherokees

Close by the road the Indians dwell,
  With polished bows of seasoned ash,
And countless other things to sell
  To those endowed with paleface cash.

Clingman's Dome

Though tragic short of Mitchell's height,
Thou art no meagre acolyte;
But exerciseth mountly sway
O'er all the Smokies' massed array.

When Roses Bloom in June

When roses bloom in June, they say,
  And summer's night is softly dim,
Such bliss shall sweep across this earth
  As neither brush nor pen can limn.

But June, tonight, is far away,
  While you are sweetly near to me;
So 'mid the hurl of wintry storm
  My heart shall sing this song to thee:

Let roses wait the warmth of June,
  Till seasons set for them appear;
I can forget the drifting snow
  So long as thou, My Love, art near;

And when the winter leads to spring,
  Or spring is lost in summer's night,
Still shalt thou be, Beloved One,
  The cherished soul of my delight.

Eve Song

The highland sun is setting;
The earth is vastly still;
An evening breeze abetting,
This night is somewhat chill,
As God, in wonted spendor,
Is jewelling the sky
With classic constellations
Which brightly testify

Of Him Who rolls the planets
Around a flaming star,
And hurls each errant comet
In wide parabola;
Yet Who, unfailing, noteth
The stricken sparrow's fall,
And constantly devoteth
His love to great and small.

So, as the sun is setting
Beyond the valley's rim,
I'll cease me from my fretting
And cast my care on Him,
Whose hand thus far hath led me,
Whose grace shall be my stay
Till safe I stand beside Him,
Where night is one with day.

Neuse River

I scarcely know the Roanoke, the Cape Fear, or the Tar,
But here's a river in the East whose fame I'll publish far,
Although the waters in its bed
For long have proved the laundry's dread,
Since they so frequently are red,
Arolling toward the sea.

For long ago, in boyhood days, when all this world was bright,
Upon that river's sun-lit banks we played from morn till night,
Since no one ever sought excuse,
When Smithfield mothers turned us loose,
For absence from the kindly Neuse,
When we were young and free.

Though since, by Alloway's Old Kirk, I've watched the Bonnie Doon,
And seen the Reuss go rushing by beneath the full Swiss moon,
Somehow, I never can forget
That friendly river where we met,
Oft-times till after sun had set—
O, happy memory!

Cypresses

Low lies a land, swept by a languid breeze,
Where aged mosses cling to wearied trees,
As somber rivers seek their destined seas.

Where listless cypresses in cadence sway
Above dark swamps, as in the sodden gray
Of morn, some lonely heron glides away.

Far are the sweep and strident stress of sound;
There muted silence, unperturbed, is found,
And hushed inertia is all around.

Carolina in the Mountains in the Fall

When the hills begin to color all their trees in autumn's hue,
In a chilly wind that's whistling as though winter's coming, too;
Then the scene across the valley makes each native son recall,
There's no place like Carolina, in the mountains, in the fall.

When you have surveyed the wood-pile to decide that it must grow,
If the house is to be heated when the winter brings its snow,
And set out to climb the hill-side with your axe, and wedge, and maul,
There's no place like Carolina, in the mountains, in the fall.

When you sit in church on Sunday and the choir begins to sing,
Till your heart starts beating faster over thanks for everything,
Thinking of each blessed season, to remember, after all,
There's no place like Carolina, in the mountains, in the fall.

Bath

Some day I'll tread that antique path
Which terminates in ancient Bath;
Since I so much would like to see
How old our oldest town can be.

Edenton Tea Party

In Edenton, some years ago, I think,
Brave women gathered, tealess tea to drink;
And, having drunk, most surely bore away
Such gossip as was current in their day.

Kitty Hawk

Sand dunes that shift in salt sea air
  With fabled site shall vie;
For it, but yesteryear, was there
  That man contrived to fly.

Night Song for the Sea

There may be brighter stars in some sky shining,
I cannot tell; yet this I know and sure,
There is no star in all the heavens repining
For such a one as I in thee adore.

There may be fairer hills beyond far ocean
Where shadows rest beside the ancient trees;
But there's no heart moved by such rapt devotion
As that which beats this side the homeland seas.

My Love, the eve is young and you, enchanting;
Nor has the earth beheld such night before,
As though the skies and seas were joined in granting
This bliss of ours by Carolina's shore.

Evening Interlude

I cannot tell why there must be such glory
On mountain peaks when daylight comes to end,
As stately hills, like those of mystic story,
Far in the distance with the skyline blend.

I cannot tell just why I can but love you,
Though I recall so many, many things;
Yet, like the brightness of the stars above you,
When much is reckoned, much, so much, remains.

As in the faint light when the night approaches,
And every summit bends toward darker hue,
So in thy presence let me move while living,
My thoughts, my life, my love encompass you.

High Point, Thomasville, Lenoir

High Point, Thomasville, Lenoir—
These there are and many more,
  Where with skillful touch and sure
  Workmen build good furniture,
Chair and table, desk and bed,
Soon to be exhibited,
  That the dealers of our nation
  May, with due appreciation,
Purchase for their season's trade
Goods by careful craftsmen made,
  Where the plane and rip-saw roar—
  High Point, Thomasville, Lenoir.

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Valdese

Not fresh, ambrosial loaves come to the mind,
When thy staunch name is echoed near to me,
Nor spindled mills wherein men rightly find
The token of an honest industry;
Nor drift my thoughts to vineyards everywhere
And homes erected on the tempered slopes
Of this new Piedmont's unrestraining air,
Where each bright day records accomplished hopes.

But as a sweet memorial, Valdese,
That name's symbolic of the glorious tales
Of how thy fathers, 'cross heroic seas,
Held fast their faith, and in far upland vales
Dared death's disaster for that Constant One,
Who shall abide when loaves and yarn are done.

The Chambered Halls of Davidson

Our fathers' fathers in long years ago,
  Wrought worthily in mortar, brick, and stone,
Till Chambers rose, with columned portico,
  To stand in silent symmetry, alone.

Our fathers gathered in those storied walls
  And grew to love their stately, solemn mein;
With careless step they trod long, spacious halls,
  And climbed wide stairs full many a time again.

There Tommy Wilson dwelt one brief year through,
  To gain such learning as the wise acquire;
On frosty nights, the welcome warmth he knew
  Of one who gazes in an open fire,

To dream, perhaps, of battles in the past
  And those who rode therein to lasting fame,
Or future Salems, realized at last,
  Or wild conclusion of some schoolboys' game.

We, too, have felt the fever of that spell
  Which Chambers cast on such as sought to know
Those mystic ways our fathers knew so well,
  At even in their lamp-light's mellow glow.

Then came that night, and as some sage had writ
"Sic itur ad astra" on her great door,
So upward, through the flames, did she transmit
Her substance into legend, yea, and more;

For now new halls resound to song and cheer
Of those who love her reincarnate smile.
They come, they go, as year succeeds to year;
They tarry where we lingered for a while.

'Tis there our sons shall greet the wintry morn
With books and talk of many a divers thing;
As we, shall they fair learning's shrine adorn
With varied gift and sundry offering.

Till present Chambers, someday, too, shall go
To that blest land where hallowed halls convene
When they have served their purpose here below
And slipped in silence from this transient scene.

Then in a realm beyond the touch of time,
Where spring eternal waits in glad array—
I, somehow, feel we'll gather in that clime
In halls beloved this side the gates of day.

Spring Song for Nebraska Prairie

Can I forget those June days on the prairie,
And such bright stars as nighttide there discerned,
On lands light touched by some indulgent fairy,
And to the green of spring withal returned?

Can I forget swift shadows on rich wheat fields
As scattered clouds rode wild below the blue,
Or watered rows, to mark the fertile beet fields,
And lines of corn scarce risen into view?

I'll not forget those soft nights on the prairie
As years pass on, their good and ill to bring;
Though tide may change and fitful fortune vary,
I'll always love the West in days of spring.

And some good night, upon that distant prairie,
On lands laid long across the world's wide face,
Once more I'll stand in vision solitary,
When Spring and I have met in that blest place.